DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 360 HE 011 684

AUTHOR Bannerman, James W.
TITLE The Identification and Classification of the Societal and Nonsocietal Factors Affecting Student Decisions Not to Return to the Southern Technical Institute. Societal Factors.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 27p.; A practicum presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Research; Dropouts; Higher Education; Institutional Characteristics; Institutional Evaluation; Institutional Research; *School Holding Power; *Social Factors; Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Southern Technical Institute GA

ABSTRACT

Reasons why students withdrew from Southern Technical Institute were examined through a survey of 721 dropouts. A total of 257 responses were received and the reasons given by the students were classified as societal or nonsocietal. In this study, societal factors are defined as those elements of influence that are external to the institution. The most frequently stated societal reasons for not returning include: transfer to another college, change in job requirements, and change in career plans. The most frequent nonsocietal reasons were financial problems and desire for time off. A follow-up study to identify action that will reduce the impact of nonsocietal factors and assure maximum retention of qualified students is recommended. It is also suggested that a similar survey be conducted biennially to identify any new factors and evaluate the institution's efforts to reduce the nonsocietal factors. The survey instrument and tabulated responses are appended. (Author/SF)

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THE IDENTIFICATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE SOCIETAL AND NONSOCIETAL FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT DECISIONS NOT TO RETURN TO THE SOUTHERN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

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SOCIETAL FACTORS

by

James W. Bannerman, M.S., P.E.

Head, Industrial Engineering Technology Department

Southern Technical Institute

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A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
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DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In order to identify and classify the reasons why students withdrew from Southern Technical Institute, a questionnaire was sent to 721 students who were registered during the 1975-76 academic year but failed to return for the 1976-77 academic year. A total of 257 responses were received and the reasons given by the students were classified as societal or nonsocietal in accordance with a definition provided by Dr. D. T. Rippey. The five most frequently stated reasons were: (1) financial problems, (2) transferred to another college, (3) change in job requirements, (4) change in career plans, and (5) desire for time off. The first and last of these factors were classified as nonsocietal and the others as societal. As a result of this survey, two recommendations were made. First, a follow-on study should be undertaken to identify action which will reduce the impact of the nonsocietal factors and assure maximum retention of qualified students. The second recommendation was that a survey similar to this practicum should be conducted on a regular biennial basis to identify any new factors and evaluate the institution's efforts to reduce the nonsocietal factors.

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INTRODUCTION

A recent investigation conducted by the Registrar at the Southern Technical Institute revealed that approximately forty-six percent of the students enrolled during the 1975-76 academic year failed to return for the 1976-77 academic year. In the light of the forecast trend toward smaller college enrollments (6:4), it behooves every institution to ensure that qualified students are not dissuaded from continuing their education by factors over which the institution has control. The purpose of this practicum was to identify and classify as societal or nonsocietal those factors which contributed to the student's decision not to return. To accomplish this purpose, a questionnaire (Appendix A) was sent to all students who attended Southern Technical Institute during the 1975-76 academic year but voluntarily did not return for either the fall or winter quarter of the 1976-77 academic year. This questionnaire requested that the students identify the reason they did not return and solicited their comments on the subject. The responses were tabulated and the various reasons were catagorized as societal or nonsocietal.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Dr. D. T. Rippey, Professor of Community College Education at the University of Texas, Austin, and national lecturer for

NOVA University, has stated, "In an educational setting, societal factors are those elements of influence on a student which are external to the institution and therefore not under the institution's control." In light of Dr. Rippey's definition, it is evident that an identification and classification of the reasons influencing students' decisions to interrupt or discontinue their education at the Southern Technical Institute fall within the realm of societal factors, and was therefore appropriate for this core module.

The Southern Technical Institute is a coeducational, residential college for day and evening students. It is a part of the University System of Georgia, and that unit of tne Georgia Institute of Technology dedicated to the educational development of engineering technologists. The college, which is located on a separate campus from Georgia Tech, has a student body of approximately 2000 and a faculty of 75 full-time professional educators. Bachelor degrees are granted in Apparel, Architectural, Civil, Electrical, Industrial, Mechanical, and Textile Engineering Technology. Engineering technology as defined by the Engineering Council for Professional Development, the accrediting authority for colleges of engineering and engineering technology, is "... part of a continuum extending from the craftsman to the

engineer, it requires the application of scientific and engineering principles in support of engineering activities." (2:89)

A review of the recent literature revealed that a number of similar studies have been conducted at various institutions over the past several years. In no case, however, have the studies addressed engineering technology students. In the words of Dr. Walter O. Carlson, Dean and Executive Director of the Southern Technical Institution, "Colleges of engineering technology are unique in their purpose and methods and as such attract a unique student." It would not be unusual then to find that these unique students have unique reasons for withdrawing from school.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Michael M. Freedland, president of Ryder Technical Institute, writing in Industrial Education, reports the result of a study in which he identified 21 reasons why students leave school before completing their degree (4:70). He groups these 21 reasons into three broad categories: Financial, Scholastic, and Rapport. In the first, he includes the need to supplement income, inability to budget, high cost of tuition and living, and unplanned marriage. In the Scholastic category, he lists irrelevancy of the program, lack of qualifications or prerequisites for the

courses, lack of motivation and enthusiasm by the instructor, inferior teachers, inadequate laboratory equipment, and obsolete course content. In his final category, Rapport, Freedland lists administration attitudes, inadequate counseling, and low credibility of the school.

In the report of a similar study at the University of Iowa (1:561), John Demitroff groups the reasons for withdrawing into seven categories and lists them in order of frequency as follows:

Disinterest in school	51%
Financial problems	31%
Vocational indecision	23%
Unavoidable problems	22%
Academic problems	19%
Emotional social problems	15%
Failure of university to resolve problems	14%

The total percent exceeds 100 because some students identified more than one reason for withdrawing. It is interesting to note that during the 1972 academic year, the period upon which Demitroff's study was based, the University of Iowa suffered an attrition rate in excess of 50%. In a separate study, Arnold Menning places attrition rates between 25% and 75% with most institutions realizing about 50% (8:753).

John Nickens, writing in College and University, reports the results of a 1970 survey of 1000 ex-students from 15 junior colleges in Florida (3:327). He lists 16 reasons for student withdrawal and concludes that finances, personal problems, and employment are the most prominent reasons. In her book, "Stopping Out," Judi Kesselman attempts to document the psychological needs of the college-age person. According to Kesselman, most students who withdraw do so because they want to do nonacademic things or "get in touch with their goals." In light of the variety of financial aid programs available, Kesselman does not accept financial needs as a valid reason for withdrawal, but hypothesizes that "... this is an excuse used by the student to mask the real source of his dissatisfaction." (5:87)

Each of the above mentioned studies discussed the withdrawal problem at a different kind of institution. Freedland was concerned with the problem in a vocational/technical school, Demitroff and Manning in major universities, and Nickens in the junior college. Southern Tech resembles each of these types of institutions in some respects, but as Dr. Carlson pointed out, Southern Tech is also unique in other respects. The previous studies do, however, provide a foundation for, and attest to, the validity, reliability, and feasability of the effort of this practicum.

The significance of this study to the institution is established in the fact that once the nonsocietal factors (those over which the institution has control) have been identified, appropriate action may be taken to insure that their impact is minimized and that maximum retention of qualified students is achieved.

PROCEDURES

A list of all students enrolled at Southern Technical Institute during the fall, winter, or spring quarters of the 1975-76 academic year was compared with a list of students enrolled in either the fall quarter of 1976 or the winter quarter of 1977. Names appearing on the first list but not on the latter were identified as nonreturning students. This list was then purged of the names of students who have graduated and of those dismissed for academic or other reasons. The remaining list contained the names of 721 students who attended Southern Tech during the 1975-76 academic year but voluntarily failed to return for the 1976-77 academic year. Each student on this list of voluntary nonreturnees was sent a questionnaire (Appendix A) inquiring as to the reasons for his withdrawal.

The questionnaire was developed by framing the most significant reasons found in the review of the literature in

the form of statements to be checked (✓) by the respondent. Space was provided for the student to add comments or additional reasons in the event of an omission in the checked responses. It was felt that a "check list" questionnaire would evoke a higher level of response than a questionnaire requiring written answers. The letter introducing the questionnaire was written as a personal appeal from a fellow student rather than an institution initiated survey. This appeal, which was accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, was designed to evoke maximum participation.

The responses to the questionnaire were tabulated and percentage of responses attributable to each reason calculated. Reasons appearing in the comments section of the questionnaire were also included in the tabulation. Any reason receiving less than a 5% response was considered extraneous and not indicative of an important societal or nonsocietal factor. Finally, the reasons were catagorized as societal or nonsocietal factors in accordance with Dr. Rippey's definition quoted in the background section of this report.

Since the entire population of voluntarily withdrawing students was surveyed, and since no analysis of the data other than the computation of percentages was accomplished, no sampling or statistical techniques were appropriate. The

Registrar, Dean of Students, and Director of Counseling at the Southern Technical Institute participated in the development of the questionnaire. Since these officers have frequent contact with students who have withdrawn or are in the process of withdrawing, they have attested to the face validity of the procedures and the questionnaire. The subject of external validity is discussed in the assumptions and limitations section of this report.

In the proposal for this practicum, it was suggested that the responses to the questionnaire be submitted to six top administrators and nine department heads at the Southern Technical Institute who would be asked to classify the reasons as societal or nonsocietal. Upon the recommendation of Kamala Anandam, the NOVA reader, this procedure was changed and an individual judgment based on Dr. Rippey's definition previously quoted was made. An amplification of the judgment method is provided in the discussion section of this report.

LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

As stated previously, the face or content validity of the procedures and questionnaire was established by expert testimony; however, there may be some question as to the external validity of the results. Will the results be valid for previous and future students or are they just valid for

the population surveyed? Since the 1975-76 academic year occurred during a period of relative economic recession in the Atlanta area and the 1976-77 academic year is during an economic upturn, the student's reasons for attending school in 1975-76 or leaving in 1976-77 may have been a function of employment opportunities. One way to establish the external validity of the study would be to repeat the survey in subsequent years and identify any cyclic trend which might be correlated to the state of the economy. For the purpose of this practicum, however, and until evidence to the contrary is obtained, it will be assumed that external validity does exist.

RESULTS

Of the 721 questionnaires sent out, 41 were returned by the post office as undeliverable. In answer to the remaining 680 questionnaires, there were 257 responses for a response rate of 38%. Within the 257 responses, it was discovered that 20 were from students who were still enrolled at Southern Tech and had incorrectly been sent questionnaires through administrative errors. The majority of these 20 active students were on extended co-op and although still active had not registered for fall or winter quarter. In consideration of the above, the number of valid responses

was reduced to 237, and the response percentages based on that figure.

Appendix B contains a tabulation of responses to each of the 40 statements and 8 additional reasons given in the comments section of the questionnaires. Tables I and II below show the categorization of these responses as nonsocietal and societal factors. Also included in the tables are the percentages of response to each factor.

TABLE I

Nonsocietal Factors Influencing Students' Decisions Not to Return to Southern Technical Institute

Factor	Percent Response
Returned to work - financial need	28
Wanted time off	10
Lack of social life on campus	8
Advantages not worth effort	8
Lost interest in school	6
Cost of books and tuition too high	5
Poor academic achievement	5
Class scheduling problems	5

TABLE II

Societal Factors Influencing Students' Decisions Not to Return to Southern Technical Institute

Factor	Percent Response
Transferred to another college	22
Change in job requirements	11
Change career plans	11
Personal family problems	9
Moved out of area	7
Sickness	6
End of GI Bill	5

It may be observed that financial need, transfer to another college, change in job requirements, change in career plans and the desire for time off head the list of factors influencing students' decisions to withdraw from school. The first and last of these five principal factors are nonsocietal while the middle three are all societal.

DISCUSSION, IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There appears to be a strong positive correlation between the factors identified in this practicum and those

reported by similar studies, as discussed in the review of the literature. As anticipated, however, the factors affecting Southern Tech students' decisions to discontinue their education are weighted towards the employment objectives with "change in job requirements" and "change in career plans" receiving strong response as societal factors. Disinterest in school and financial problems also rated high in both the practicum and the previous studies. This strong positive correlation further attests to the validity and reliability of the current effort.

The purpose of this practicum was to identify and classify as societal and nonsocietal those factors which influence students' decisions not to return to Southern Technical Institute. Tables I and II reflect the classification of those factors. Obviously some of the factors might have been classified as either societal or nonsocietal, depending on the reason for that factor becoming a decision criteria. For example, "Financial Problem" would be classified as nonsocietal if the problems were a result of insufficient financial aid available at the school or an administrative decision to limit financial aid to people in certain disciplines or with certain academic averages. On the other hand, "Financial Problem" would be classified as a societal factor if the problem resulted from lack of

parental financial support or as a result of non-school debts incurred by the student, i.e., buying a new car, having a baby, etc. In cases where the factor could be classified as either societal or nonsocietal, a unilateral best judgment decision was made. For example, it was felt that adequate financial aid is available through co-op, work-study, direct student loans, scholarships, grants, and part-time employment to meet the financial requirements of practically every needy student. Because the students are frequently unaware of the aid available, however, they may drop out of school and accept full-time employment. "Financial Problem" may be symptomatic of an institutional deficiency in disseminating information about available financial aid, and the factor was therefore classified as nonsocietal. Similar analysis was applied to each of the factors, and the categorization as shown in Tables I and II reflects a "best judgment" of the information available.

As stated previously, the purpose of this practicum was merely to identify and categorize the factors. It was not to develop recommendations that would minimize the impact of these factors. As a result of this practicum, however, such an effort has been requested by the Dean of the Southern Technical Institute and will be the subject of a follow-on study. It is appropriate to note that the

information received from the present survey, particularly the students' comments, will provide an excellent starting point from which the follow-on study may be launched. It was with that end in mind that the original questionnaire was modified to include information concerning "academic major" and "last quarter attended." It may be implied, then, that this study will ultimately result in a set of recommended changes and procedures which, when implemented, will reduce the impact of the nonsocietal factors and ensure maximum retention of qualified students at the Southern Technical Institute.

Based on the valuable information obtained from this study, two recommendations are made. First that the follow-on study requested by the Dean be undertaken in the near future. This study should be a joint effort of several key officers of the institution, namely the Registrar, the Director of Counseling, the Dean of Students, the Director of Financial Aid, the Academic Dean, and selected department heads. The study should recommend appropriate actions to reduce the impact of the nonsocietal factors identified in this practicum.

The second recommendation is that a survey similar to this practicum should be conducted by the institute on a regular biennial basis. The survey will identify areas for

potential reduction of nonsocietal factors and provide a tool for evaluation of the efforts directed and reducing those factors.

The information obtained from this practicum and the implementation of its recommendations should enhance the institution's ability to retain qualified students and reduce attrition by a significant percentage.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

SOUTHERN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
MARIETTA, GEORGIA 30060

February 23, 1977

Dear Larry,

Would you please help me? As part of my graduate studies, I have been asked to determine the reasons why students like yourself who were in school last year did not return this year. Would you take a few moments to check all boxes below which are appropriate to you. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for you to return your response to me. Your cooperation will be appreciated.

Sincerely,

James W. Bannerman

James W. Bannerman
IET Department

Check the appropriate boxes.

A. The last quarter I attended Southern Tech was:

( ) 1. Fall ( ) 2. Winter ( ) 3. Spring

B. I was a:

( ) 4. Day Student ( ) 5. Night Student

C. My major department was:

( ) 6. AET ( ) 7. AMET ( ) 8. CET

( ) 9. EET ( ) 10. IET ( ) 11. MET

( ) 12. TET ( ) 13. F.S.

D. I did not return to Southern Tech this year because:

( ) 14. For financial reasons, I had to return to work.

( ) 15. I got married.

( ) 16. I got sick or had sickness in my family.

( ) 17. I had personal or family problems.

( ) 18. I didn't think the advantages were worth the effort.

23

(More on the other side)

( ) 19. I did poorly and didn't think I could pass.
( ) 20. I just wanted some time off.
( ) 21. I had a problem with a teacher or administrator.
( ) 22. I transferred to another college.
( ) 23. I didn't have good transportation to and from school.
( ) 24. The cost of books and tuition was too high.
( ) 25. I was recalled to my old job.
( ) 26. There wasn't enough social life at Southern Tech.
( ) 27. I didn't think Southern Tech was a very good school.
( ) 28. I decided to change my career plans.
( ) 29. I needed help with my studies and couldn't get it.
( ) 30. I just lost interest in school
( ) 31. We moved out of the area.
( ) 32. Other reasons (please list below).

E. I might return to school if:

( ) 33. I could get financial assistance.
( ) 34. I could get help with my studies.
( ) 35. My wife could get a job.
( ) 36. I could get a part-time job.
( ) 37. There were more girls and things to do.
( ) 38. I could afford to live in the dorms.
( ) 39. There was public transportation.
( ) 40. Other (please list below)

Comments: Please list any other reasons or comments you would like to make.

APPENDIX B

TABULATION OF RESPONSES

TABULATION OF REASONS FOR LEAVING SOUTHERN TECH

(237 Respondents)

		Number of Responses	% of Responses
A.	Last quarter attended Southern Tech		
	1. Fall 1975	59	25
	2. Winter 1976	58	24
	3. Spring 1976	122	51
B.	Category of student		
	4. Day school	143	60
	5. Night school	87	34
C.	Academic major		
	6. Architectural Engineering Technology	23	9
	7. Apparel Engineering Technology	42	18
	8. Civil Engineering Technology	35	15
	9. Electrical Engineering Technology	61	26
	10. Industrial Engineering Technology	33	14
	11. Mechanical Engineering Technology	24	10
	12. Textile Engineering Technology	3	1
	13. Fire Science Technology	16	7
D.	Reason for not returning		
	14. Financial reasons - return to work	66	28
	15. Got married	8	3
	16. Illness	15	6
	17. Personal problem	21	7
	18. Advantages not worth effort	16	7
	19. Poor academic performance	11	5
	20. Wanted time off	23	10
	21. Problem with teacher or administrator	4	2
	22. Transferred to another college	53	22
	23. Poor transportation	5	2
	24. High cost of books and tuition	12	5
	25. Recalled to work	5	2
	26. Lack of social life on campus	18	8
	27. College has poor reputation	4	2
	28. Change in career plans	27	11
	29. Needed help but couldn't get it	4	2
	30. Lost interest in school	13	6
	31. Moved out of area	16	7
	32. Other reasons (see 41 through 48)	31	13

	Number Responses	% of Responses
E. Would return to school if		
33. Could get financial help	28	12
34. Could get academic help	7	3
35. Wife could find employment	4	2
36. Could find part-time employment	10	4
37. More girls on campus	12	5
38. Could afford to live in dorms	2	1
39. There were public transportation	1	1
40. Other conditions	24	10
F. Reasons provided in comments		
41. Misunderstood school policy	2	1
42. Entered military service	5	2
43. Job requirements changed	26	11
44. Had to pay nonresident tuition	2	1
45. Was a transit student	5	2
46. Student died	2	1
47. Course scheduling problems	17	5
48. GI Bill ran out	12	5